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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The development of the Girl Child: A push from youth organizations

As the world's largest international voluntary organization for girls and young women, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) that has been active in both Beijing +5 and Beijing +10 review processes nationally, regionally and internationally, recommits itself to working for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and for the advancement of the human rights of all women, with special attention to the needs of girls and young women. WAGGGS recognizes that girls are a particularly neglected group in many countries' societies: possibly the most neglected group in many developing countries. For many girls, their lives are dominated by the importance of conforming to male-imposed stereotypes. There is very little litigation or help available to promote the rights of the girl child; this is why WAGGGS believes that interaction and cooperation, based on complementarity and partnership between youth organizations, NGOs, governments and international organizations, is needed to achieve the common goals of the Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals.

L.2: Eliminate negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls.

WAGGGS has been working in full compliance with strategic objective L2, action 277 d, by providing high-quality, non-formal education programmes that support girls and enable them to acquire knowledge, develop self-esteem and take responsibility for their own lives; and place special focus on programmes to educate women and men, especially parents, on the importance of girls' physical and mental health and well-being, including the elimination of discrimination against girls in food allocation, early marriage, and violence against girls. Over many years, the Guiding system, or 'learning by doing', has been found to be a highly effective method of learning and developing. Girls can join the Movement from the age of five and work in groups or patrols that provide an ideal framework in which the individual can plan and implement projects, undertake responsibilities, experience relationships, reflect and evaluate with others. Furthermore, the peer group plays an extremely important role in the process of acquisition of values by young people. The opinion of peers is particularly influential when a young person has to make choices, especially those which are value based, such as with drugs or sexual relationships.

WAGGGS is committed to continue providing high-quality, non-formal educational programs and encourages national education systems to:

- Eliminate gender bias and discrimination in educational materials and methods;
- Include all forms of education systems, both formal and non-formal;
- Ensure that access to formal and non-formal education is equally available to boys and girls;
- Ensure that national resources are specified for girls' education;
- Provide pre- and in-service gender-sensitization training for teachers;
- Raise parental awareness of the communal and family benefits of female schooling.

Strategic objective L.4. Eliminate discrimination against girls in education, skills development and training

WAGGGS has been working in full compliance with Strategic objective L.4 action 280, by providing education and skills training to increase girls' opportunities for employment and access to decision-making processes. Through Guiding and Scouting, many girls also learn income-generating skills, such as Rhoa Stove making (energy-efficient cooking) in Liberia, and dressmaking and industrial sewing in El Salvador.

Strategic objective L.5. Eliminate discrimination against girls in health and nutrition. Actions to be taken.

WAGGGS has been working actively to implement Strategic objective L.5 action 281 # by establishing peer education and outreach programmes with a view to strengthening individual and collective action to reduce the vulnerability of girls to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. WAGGGS provides education on sensitive issues that girls otherwise may not have the opportunity to understand: WAGGGS runs peer education projects on HIV/ AIDS, adolescent health, promoting healthy lifestyles, food and nutrition, the prevention of adolescent pregnancy. Throughout the world, Girl Guides and Girl Scouts are now earning the WAGGGS AIDS Badge by undertaking activities in three areas: fighting fear, shame and injustice; prevention through change in behaviour; and care and support for people living with HIV/AIDS.

WAGGGS encourages governments to support action and advocacy that reduce the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV infection and to improve the quality of life for those already living with HIV.

Strategic objective L.8. Promote the girl child's awareness of and participation in social, economic and political life

WAGGGS has been working in full compliance with Strategic objective L.8 action 284 b, by promoting the equality and participation of girls in society. One of WAGGGS' fundamental aims is to enable girls to become **decision makers** and give them **leadership skills**. In their patrols, girls are given opportunities for leadership within a safe environment. As they grow older, their opportunities expand and as young women, they are able to take positions of responsibility on their National Board and on the WAGGGS World Board. Girls and young women with decision-making and leadership skills are able to use these skills in their own communities and in their own lives. A study of professional women by the Girl Scouts of America revealed that most of the women surveyed were once Girl Scouts and cited Girl Scouting as having a positive effect on their lives.

All these different factors encourage self-progression and self-awareness, build self-esteem, and develop key life skills so that girls and young women are more confident, assertive, and aware of their rights as equal human beings, in line with *Strategic objective L.5 of the Platform for Action: promote and protect the rights of the girl child and increase awareness of her needs and potential.*

WAGGGS encourages governments to support NGO's and youth organizations that work with girls. Non-governmental youth organizations need adequate resources to help develop in girls and young women many of the attributes

necessary to make them successful individuals and leaders of society, i.e. the development of self-confidence and self-esteem, the management of change in economic society, health and reproductive health education, leadership development, literacy.

WAGGGS will strengthen its efforts to realize the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action. There is so much to be done. The task of changing attitudes and eliminating discrimination against the girl child is a huge one. But small steps are being made and some positive changes are happening. WAGGGS is part of the 'Big 7' youth organizations, (including the YWCA, YMCA, WOSM, IAA, IFRCS, IYF). Together, this encompasses 100 million young people. If 100 million young people use peer education to inform just one of their friends about the dangers of discrimination and gender inequality and this carries on, many millions of people will grow up in a fairer society.

In this effort, youth organizations and NGOs need the recognition and support of governments and UN agencies to continue to develop and to support the Girl Child and ensure full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.